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OPERATIONAL ART AND THE RISING SUN

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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# OPERATIONAL ART AND THE RISING SUN

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A Long Time Ago? Over fifty years have passed since the Japanese attack upon United States forces in the Pacific. By the american way of thinking, it was a long time ago. Conversely, in the minds of people from other countries and cultures, whose remembered past is chronicled in centuries rather than decades, the events of 1941 are those of "just yesterday."

The anniversary of one particular yesterday, December 7, 1941 (December 8 Tokyo time), passes with little notice in Japan today. However, actions taken by their military forces on that fateful day were to affect the Japanese people as deeply as any event in modern history. The planning and decision making behind this military action is fertile ground in which to study the application of operational art.

Questions of Operational Art. The United States Army's keystone warfighting doctrine defines operational art as:

. . . the skillful employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives within a theater through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of theater strategies, campaigns, major operations and battles.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Headquarters Dept. of the Army, FM 100-5 Operations (Washington: 1993), p. 6-2.

Additionally, this doctrine states:

Operational art requires broad vision, the ability to anticipate, a careful understanding of the relationship of means to ends, an understanding of the inherent risks that are under them, and effective joint and combined cooperation. It challenges the commander to answer three questions:

- \* What military conditions will achieve the strategic objectives in the theater of war or theater of operations?
- \* What sequence of actions is most likely to produce these conditions?
- \* How should the commander apply military resources within established limitations to accomplish that sequence of actions?<sup>2</sup>

These three questions not only arm today's commander with a logical thought process enabling him to "get there from here", they also provide a superb context from which to explore historical examples for lessons to be learned. This paper will examine the Japanese Imperial Navy's 1941 planning effort (in preparation for hostilities with the United States) in the context of these questions critical to the operational art.

Looking Forward. As we search for lessons from the past, it is important, at the same time, to draw parallels to our present world situation. The discussion of this particular planning effort (a plan which resulted in such striking success, at first, yet led ultimately to devastating defeat)

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

should provide insights of great value to future planning evolutions.

## CHAPTER II

### APPLICATION OF OPERATIONAL ART BY THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL NAVY IN THE PLANNING EFFORT FOR THE ATTACK ON UNITED STATES FORCES DECEMBER 7/8, 1941.

Strategic Objectives. To say that 1941 was a "turbulent year" for Japan's political leaders would be a gross understatement. A tense world situation, driven by an escalating war in Europe, electrified the political atmosphere. To the Japanese, the lack of stability in world affairs provided new opportunities to expand their influence in the Pacific. Already involved in an expansionist war with China (see chronology in APPENDIX I), the Japanese saw new regional opportunities in French and Dutch holdings placed "on the block" by developments in Europe. Rich in natural resources including oil, rubber, nickel, tin and bauxite (raw ore for aluminum), these holdings (if gained) would provide a huge step towards Japan's military production self-sufficiency. Plans for the formation of a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere became the basis of Japanese National Policy.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout early 1941 the Japanese political leaders

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<sup>1</sup>Nobutaka Ike, Japan's Decision for War Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 80.

struggled with the direction of movement for the Co-prosperity Sphere. Faced with two major options, termed the "Northern Question" (actions to be taken to ensure security from Russia) and the "Southern Question" (actions exercising further expansion to the south), government and military factions carefully studied and passionately debated which way to proceed. On July 2, 1941 the "Outline of National Policies in View of the Changing Situation" was approved in an Imperial Conference.<sup>2</sup> Japan would expand south.

One important question blocking the strategic goal of the "Southern Option" was how the United States would react to further expansion. The political situation between the Japan and the United States was already in a state of disrepair. Disagreements, on developments in China (including U.S. support of Chiang Kai-shek) and upon Japanese actions the United States viewed as a continuing expansionist policy, created an impasse to pacific region political concerns. Although they hoped to avoid direct conflict, Japanese leadership knew that preparations for war with Great Britain and the United States needed to be made.<sup>3</sup>

Japan's move into southern Indochina in late July 1941 brought quick reaction from the United States. President Roosevelt closed the Panama canal to Japanese ships and froze

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-79.

<sup>3</sup>David Bergamini, Japan's Imperial Conspiracy (New York: Morrow, 1971) pp. 769-771.

all Japanese assets in the United States. Trade between Japan and the United States came to a standstill. President Roosevelt, without technically banning oil sales, produced the same effect.<sup>4</sup> To exacerbate the Japanese position, within days, Great Britain and the Dutch East Indies also cut their supplies of oil and other goods to Japan. The clock was ticking. Japan's fleet oil reserve was 6,450,000 tons and the navy was burning it at a rate of 400 tons per hour. The 18 month supply, even if stretched, would be exhausted in three years.<sup>5</sup> If Japan's established policy for a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere was to be realized, further action would be required. The Japanese Imperial Navy would prove to be key participants in that future action.

The Japanese Imperial Navy faced an extremely difficult situation if a conflict was realized with the United States. The Japanese Navy Minister, Admiral Shigetaro Shimada believed there was little chance to exploit a conquest of Southeast Asia with the "Southern Operation" line flanked by a dominant U.S. Fleet, prepared to strike at a time and in a manner of it's own choosing.<sup>6</sup> However, barring a political solution, the "Southern Operation" was required to obtain the critical

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<sup>4</sup>Ralph E. Shaffer, Toward Pearl Harbor (New York: Weiner, 1991), p. 128.

<sup>5</sup>John D. Potter, Yamamoto The Man Who Menaced America (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 46; Bergamini, p. 801.

<sup>6</sup>Shigeru Fukudome, "Hawaii Operation," Paul Stillwell, ed., Air Raid: Pearl Harbor! (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1991), p. 58.

resources available from Indochina, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Admiral Fukudome, Chief of Staff Japanese Combined Fleet (under Admiral Yamamoto's command), wrote after the war, "Since the Japanese realized that there was no means of isolating the United States from operations in Southeast Asia, the main target of the Japanese Navy from the outset was to be the U.S. Fleet, and all other objectives were to be treated as secondary."

The Japanese Imperial Navy had correctly determined that the military condition required in the Pacific, to achieve the strategic goal of establishing a "Co-prosperity Sphere", was the elimination of the U.S. Fleet.

Sequence of Actions. The elimination of the U.S. Fleet was not a new concept. Since 1909, the Japanese Navy had made the United States it's hypothetical enemy in Pacific war plans.\* An "orthodox" defensive plan had been accepted and exercised by the Japanese Navy for some thirty odd years. The rationale behind the plan was sound. The Japanese Navy, inferior in numbers (the Washington Conferences limited Japan to a ratio of major combatants less than those of the United States and Britain), would fight a war of attrition. Using submarine and surface forces in carefully chosen engagements,

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\*Ibid., p. 59.

\*John J. Stephan, Hawaii Under the Rising Sun (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), p. 72.

the Japanese Navy would pick at U.S. naval forces fighting their way across the Pacific. The war would terminate in a decisive naval battle in familiar Japanese home waters.<sup>9</sup>

No matter how well practiced, this particular plan was defensive in nature. Leaving the initiative to the enemy would not protect the vulnerable "Southern Operations," nor would it ensure timely opportunity for the elimination of the U.S. Fleet.

A major proponent of an offensive plan was Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander in Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet. Yamamoto was convinced that when hostilities commenced the United States would move immediately to threaten the "Southern Operations." Familiar with the strength of the America's resources and capabilities (after two tours of duty in the United States), Yamamoto knew the balance of naval power would favor the United States in an extended conflict.<sup>10</sup> Each day which passed, without a major Japanese/American naval battle, would diminish the odds of a Japanese victory when that battle eventually came. Yamamoto is quoted as telling Prime Minister Konoe, "If I am told to fight regardless of the consequences, I shall run wild for the first six months or a year, but I have utterly no confidence for the second or third

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<sup>9</sup>Potter, p. 46; Michael Slackman, Target: Pearl Harbor (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Potter, pp. 47-48.

years."<sup>11</sup> The question then became, "What could he do in those first six months?"

The plan to attack the U.S. Fleet at Pearl Harbor was not quickly developed. Near the close of 1940, Admiral Yamamoto chose Rear Admiral Takijiro Ohnishi to do the initial planning for the "Hawaii Operation". The strike was outlined as a crippling blow at the U.S. Pacific Fleet and simultaneous launching of southern operations to capture the oil areas.<sup>12</sup> Ohnishi was an experienced air officer ranked highly by his peers for his practical knowledge. As planning progressed, Ohnishi drew Commander Minoru Genda into the effort. Genda, recently returned from duty as assistant naval air attache in London, had extensive knowledge of the English aerial torpedo success in Taranto against the Italians. By April, 1941 Ohnishi and Genda had developed a plan they felt carried a sixty per cent chance of success (Admiral Fukudome, after being briefed, estimated a forty per cent chance of success).<sup>13</sup> No matter what the odds, Yamamoto had an offensive plan!

The next move for Admiral Yamamoto, was to sell his Hawaii Operation Plan to the Japanese hierarchy, as "the" required action to eliminate the U.S. Fleet. Reaction from the General Staff when first exposed to the "Hawaii Operation"

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<sup>11</sup>Stephan, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup>Fukudome, p. 60; Potter, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>Potter, p. 57.

was completely negative. They simply doubted it could succeed. Even after numerous meetings between the Combined Fleet Staff and the Navy General Staff, and a successful showing in the September 1941 prewar war games, it took the personal threat of Admiral Yamamoto's resignation to gain Admiral Nagano's blessing from the Naval General Staff.<sup>14</sup>

The die was cast. Admiral Yamamoto's plan received Imperial sanction on 5 November 1941.<sup>15</sup> However it is important to realize that the plan did not come through this process unscathed. Two members of Admiral Yamamoto's combined staff, Captain Kameto Kuroshima and Commander Yasuji Watanabe had studied the feasibility of amphibious landings on Oahu following the planned air raid. They found the chances for success looked good (Commander Genda, also in their camp, argued for an amphibious assault).<sup>16</sup> After an initial heated exchange with the General Staff on the subject, the prospect came up once again during the prewar war game evolution. A vocal argument, on the pros and cons of an Oahu amphibious assault, occurred between Captain Kuroshima and Rear Admiral Seiichi Ito (Vice Chief of the Navy General Staff). Ito felt the complexity of the operation, combined with the air attack was too risky. Although the sequence of action which included

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<sup>14</sup>Fukudome, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 64; Ike, p. 208.

<sup>16</sup>Stephan, p. 81; Thomas C. Hone, "Tora! Tora! Tora!," Bernard C. Nalty, ed. Pearl Harbor and the War in the Pacific, (New York: Smithmark, 1991), p. 29.

an amphibious landing was more likely to produce the elimination of U.S. Naval Forces, Admiral Yamamoto came to a decision to back Ito's cautious approach.<sup>17</sup> The option that may have given Yamamoto more, than his "six months to run wild," was discarded.

Application of Military Resources. Yamamoto's plan called for an attack on the U.S. Fleet in Pearl Harbor and the simultaneous launching of the "Southern Operation". It is important to note the significant magnitude of these concurrent operations. The Japanese Army's Unit-82 Strike-South plan called for coordinated troop landings in Malaya, the Philippines, Wake, Guam, Borneo and Java. During this offensive, Army Chief of Staff Sugiyama expected to use 11 Japanese divisions (220,000 men) against the 200,000 man strength of opposition forces.<sup>18</sup> These force levels translated into substantial transport, tanker and escort requirements for the Japanese Navy. The Japanese Navy disclosed their support plans for the Unit-82 operations in a series of presentations lasting six days. Throughout these proceedings, Admiral Yamamoto examined and criticized the planning, paring excess forces to build his "Hawaii Operation" force... one tanker, one destroyer and one air group/carrier at a time.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Stephen, p. 82; Potter, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup>Bergamini, p. 809.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 781.

The magnitude of the Army's Unit-82 Strike-South plan raises the question, "Why wasn't the allocation of troops considered for an invasion scenario in the "Hawaii Operation?" The answer can most likely be found in the Army's continental orientation, for current and historical reasons, which focused on China and Russia. From an Army perspective it was Russia, and not the United States, which posed the greatest threat to Japanese security and the formation of the Co-prosperity Sphere.<sup>20</sup> Hawaii was not considered in their planning. The Japanese Navy would have little luck changing this perspective given the poor communications between the services. Although it is true the "Hawaii Operation" required special security considerations, the plan was first revealed to Army representatives on 15 September 1941, too late to be considered in relationship to Unit-82 planning.<sup>21</sup>

Admiral Yamamoto collected an impressive force to execute the "Hawaii Operation." Thirty-three warships consisting of six carriers, two battleships, two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, eleven destroyers, three submarines and eight tankers were to rendezvous in the Kurile islands, proceed to Hawaiian waters and operate in such a matter as to destroy the U.S. Fleet at the outset of the war.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, a force of 27 submarines (I-class boats with a 12,000 mile cruising range)

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<sup>20</sup>Stephen, p. 69.

<sup>21</sup>Bergamini, p. 789.

<sup>22</sup>Fukudome, p. 67.

were sent ahead of the force to take station around Oahu. The submarines were tasked to attack any fleet units attempting to enter or leave Pearl Harbor after the air attack.<sup>23</sup>

Admiral Yamamoto's striking force was not only impressive in size. It contained highly trained aircrew, who had flown more than fifty flights in preparation for the Pearl Harbor attack. Using areas within Japanese waters that provided similar topography (such as Kagoshima Bay), pilots became proficient in the same difficult flight profiles they would experience in Hawaii.<sup>24</sup> The force also included five "secret" weapons, midget submarines, which had just concluded years of development. As a backstop to the air attacks, they were planned to ensure more damage to the American fleet. The midget submarines were tasked to enter the harbor just before dawn, and attack at a time most favorable in the judgement of the crew.<sup>25</sup>

Based upon the relative failure of midget submarine units (including early discovery by American forces which nearly destroyed the covertness of the air attack), it would be easy "second guess" Admiral Yamamoto for authorizing their use. However, without the luxury of historical knowledge on how effective the air attack would be, the advantage of having a second formula for success (which the midgets provided) cannot

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid, pp. 66-70.

<sup>24</sup>Slackman, pp. 15-16.

<sup>25</sup>Potter, pp. 75-76.

be discounted.

There are two areas concerning application of forces that we should perhaps "second guess" Admiral Yamamoto and his planning staff. The first is in the area of the strike force tasking. It appears from the outside that the complexity of the evolution and various elements of the execution (such as requirement for surprise), overshadowed the careful evaluation of what the strike should accomplish strategically. The strategic goal was to eliminate the U.S. Fleet from it's position of strength against the "southern Operation" (and creation of the Co-prosperity Sphere). However, during the attack assigned targets included only aircraft, air fields and ships in the harbor.<sup>26</sup> Targets critical to the U.S. Fleets continuing operation in the Pacific, such as the Submarine Base, Naval Shipyard, Navy Supply Center, Ammunition Depot at West Loch and the fuel oil "tank farm" (containing almost as much petroleum as Japan's entire stockpile) were overlooked.<sup>27</sup>

When the senior surviving officer from the planning effort, Commander Genda, was asked why the "tank farm" was not bombed he replied ingenuously that nobody had thought of this

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<sup>26</sup>Homer N. Wallin, Pearl Harbor: Why, How, Fleet Salvage and Final Appraisal (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1968), p. 91.

<sup>27</sup>Bergamini, p. 847.

target.<sup>28</sup> Considering the fact that there were only three oilers in the Navy's entire West Coast inventory, it is easy to see the crippling impact target selection could have had on the U.S. Pacific Fleet if planned strategically.<sup>29</sup>

Problems with strike tasking also included the determination of the number of attack waves to be performed. Operating within the guidelines which Yamamoto had provided him, Vice Admiral Nagumo (embarked officer in charge of the Hawaii Operation) chose to terminate the battle after the successful return of the second wave attackers. He made this decision above the objections of his airmen and despite the fact he had suffered only light damage to his forces.<sup>30</sup> Had he been given more explicit tasking concerning the strikes goals from Yamamoto, in the form of targets destruction or limits of "own force" losses, perhaps Nagumo would have stood his ground for one or more additional waves of attack.

The second area of force application where we may chose to "second guess" Admiral Yamamoto, and perhaps more directly Admiral Nagumo was in the use of search aircraft for reconnaissance from the carriers. The attacking force was notified the night prior to the attack that no american carriers in

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<sup>28</sup>Joseph K. Taussig, "A Tactical View of Pearl Harbor", Paul Stillwell, ed., Air Raid: Pearl Harbor! (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), p. 139.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Gordon W. Prange, et al., God's Samurai, (Washington: Brassey's (US), 1990), pp. 39-41.

port Pearl Harbor. A close reconnaissance of the whole area of attack should have been conducted, not only to locate additional targets, but to ensure the attacking force was safe from carrier attack itself.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Japanese planners, desiring to maximize "strike" aircraft, were lulled into false confidence by the submarine forces stationed around Hawaii. In historical fact, the closest american carrier, USS Enterprise, was only 200 miles west of Hawaii sailing towards Pearl Harbor. The failure of the Japanese to incorporate reconnaissance had cost them the opportunity for the world's first carrier vs. carrier engagement (and later it was to cost them the Battle of Midway).

### CHAPTER III

#### CONCLUSIONS

Opportunity Lost. As we view the planning effort for the "Hawaii Operation" as a whole, one must admire the amazing complexity of the operation as well as the boldness and professionalism of it's participants. History has shown that the skill and influence required to enable such an undertaking is found in few men. Admiral Yamamoto was such a man.

In looking at an operation after fifty years, it is easy

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<sup>31</sup>Fukudome, p. 73; Minoru Genda, "Evolution of Aircraft Carrier Tactics of the Imperial Japanese Navy," Paul Stillwell, ed., Air Raid: Pearl Harbor! (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), p. 27.

to point out theoretical deficiencies in a planning effort, based on the clearer picture of "cause and effect" history provides. In the case of the "Hawaii Operation," it did not take fifty years for some to realize that an opportunity had been lost, a strategy had fallen short. Admiral Yamamoto himself wrote to a close friend, "If we had known that the air units alone could achieve so much in the Hawaii Operation, we wouldn't have used just air units...but we didn't know that at the time, and it can't be helped."<sup>1</sup> Considering the political situation of 1941 and the relationship between the Japanese Army and Navy, perhaps Yamamoto was correct.

Value Added. It is important that as we walk away from this look at history we realize that the lessons learned back in 1941 have application today. That is the "value added."

The detailed concepts we have touched on, such as the need for reconnaissance in the battlefield and the value of strategic thinking in target planning still apply directly today. However, they are limited to a small audience for application( A Joint Force Air Component Commander and his staff may apply these lessons directly). The broader concepts, such as the importance of effective joint force planning or the requirement to review ones planning effort in light of strategic objectives can be applied to a multitude of

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<sup>1</sup>John J. Stephan, Hawaii Under the Rising Sun, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), p. 91.

military applications.

The important thing is to learn the lessons history provides.

## APPENDIX I

### CHRONOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

6 February, 1922	Washington Conference
27 March, 1933	Japan Quits League of Nations
7 July, 1937	Marco Polo Bridge, Sino-Japanese war begins
12 December, 1937	Japan Aircraft Sink U.S.S. Panay
1 September, 1939	Germany Invades Poland
July, 1940	Export Controls on U.S. Trade with Japan
September, 1940	Japan Occupies Northern Indochina
27 September, 1940	Axis Pact Signed
13 April, 1941	Japan-Soviet Neutrality Pact
22 June, 1941	Germany Attacks Russia
2 July, 1941	Japanese Imperial Conference Confirms Move to South
23 July, 1941	Japan Occupies Southern Indochina
26 July, 1941	Roosevelt Freezes All Japanese Assets in U.S.
1 August, 1941	Roosevelt Embargoes Sale of Oil to Japan
6 September, 1941	Japan Sets Deadline for Negotiations
16 October, 1941	Konoye Cabinet Resigns, Tojo New Premier
7 November, 1941	Japanese Set Date for Pearl Harbor Attack
25 November, 1941	Japanese Carriers Leave for Pearl Harbor Attack
1 December, 1941	Emperor Approves War Plans
7 December, 1941	Attack on Pearl Harbor

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph E. Slater, ed., Toward Pearl Harbor (New York: Markus Wiener, 1991), p. 173-175.

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